



2003 Enrollment Restriction

Background:

By law, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs is required to review, on an annual basis, the patient enrollment system. The purpose of this review is to ensure that adequate resources are available to provide quality and timely health care to all enrolled veterans. When the demand for services exceeds VA's ability to provide such care, the Secretary is required to make enrollment adjustments.

Current Demand:

Between 1996 and 2002, VA experienced a dramatic increase in health care enrollment—approximately doubling to reach 6.8 million veterans. Further, in 2002, VA treated over a million more patients than in 1996 with significantly fewer employees. This tremendous growth in demand for health care services coupled with limited resources has prevented VA from providing timely access to quality health care to all enrolled veterans.

Decision:

Effective January 17, 2003, VA suspended NEW enrollment of veterans assigned to Priority Group 8 (VA's lowest priority group consisting of higher income veterans). Veterans enrolled in Priority Group 8 on or before January 16, 2003, remain enrolled and continue to be eligible for the full-range of VA health care services. Enrollment of veterans into Priority Groups 1 through 7 is NOT impacted by this suspension and continues without restriction.

Impact:

Restriction of new enrollment for Priority Group 8 veterans will allow VA to continue providing the high quality health care that veterans deserve. It will also reduce waiting times for current users and for newly enrolled veterans in higher statutory priority groups. This decision allows VA to refocus on its core mission of caring for veterans with service-connected conditions, veterans with special authority based on military service, lower-income veterans, and those with special health care needs, including veterans who may suffer significant combat disabilities in the future.